69: Lewis T-5 (1950) 1951 AM1 Indochina
Laotians AM8

and to produce an occasional tranquil canvas, but Luang Prabang has not yet found a Gauguin.

On the day after our arrival I was invited home by Dupont to meet his wife, whose bicycle was still in pieces when he got back. They lived in a charming Mediterranean sort of house that had nestled down well among the pagodas. It was full of animals, including a large, handsome, domesticated goat that delighted to lurk behind furniture and charge unsuspecting guests.

Madame Dupont was pretty and gay, tall for a Laotian and evidently as nearly European in type as Dupont had been able to find. They seemed very attached to each other. Dupont assured me that jealousy was quite unknown in Laos, and that his wife not only expected him to have adulterous adventures while away from home, but actually advised him in the precautions to take. He did not know whether she allowed herself similar liberties, but thought it likely that she did. At all events he didn't see how he could very well show himself less civilized about it than was she. I was sorry not to be able to understand anything his wife said, except the inevitable *bo pen nhang* which was repeated several times. In a polite effort to make me feel at home, Madame Dupont brought out the family snapshot album and we turned the pages together. There were one or two photographs, evidently taken by her husband, of not fully dressed ladies who were also not Madame. She drew my attention to these, giggling slightly.

After supper, an army officer came in with another Laotian lady. Speaking in an extraordinary whisper, he told me that she was a Princess — a member of the royal family — and entitled to a parasol of five tiers. He admitted, quite frankly, that there was no shortage of princesses in Luang Prabang, and all genuine. They had been friends for fifteen years now, he whispered, although they had never troubled to marry . . . why, he couldn't think. It was easy enough. Dupont agreed with him here, mentioning the case of a subordinate of his who had recently arrived. 'At six o'clock,' Dupont said, 'he expressed the wish to get married. My wife went out to look for a

69: Lewis T-5 (1950) 1951 AM1 Indochina
Laotians AM8

837 suitable girl, and was back with one by six-thirty. At seven the
588 bonzes came and performed a marriage ceremony which took half an hour. At seven-thirty we opened a bottle of champagne and drank to the health of the bride and bridegroom, and by eight they were already in bed.'

548 The evening was rounded off by a routine visit to the local opium den, which, probably by design, was as decrepit and sinister as a waxworks exhibit. We stayed only a few minutes in this green-lit, melodramatic establishment, but it was clear that the unprofitable puff at the pipe was not to be avoided. One had to make some show of going to the devil.

000 I was lodged in the minor palace of the *Conseiller de la République*, the senior French official in Northern Laos, a Monsieur Leveau. The *Conseiller* was a man whose shyness and slight reserve of manner failed to mask a quite extraordinary hospitality. He never, for instance, issued a formal invitation to a meal, preferring with an air of casual assumption to say something like: 'Of course, you'll be dining at home tonight.' Monsieur Leveau was married to a Laotian wife, to whom I was not presented, and the huge official building always seemed strangely empty. We dined facing each other across a darkly gleaming wasteland of ambassadorial table. Sometimes a Laotian servant stole into the room carrying dishes; trailing behind him the distant sounds of a domestic interior. These were immediately sealed off by the closing of the door, leaving us to the vault-like silences of the huge room. As we sat there the light bulbs gave out in various parts of the room and were swiftly re-
365 placed. In Luang Prabang the electric current was switched on at the same time as the water was turned off – at seven-thirty. But the result was no more than a feeble striving of the filament, and the lamp in my bedroom produced a light considerably less than that of one candle. Monsieur Leveau partly got over this difficulty by enormously over-running lamps intended for a much lower voltage, but they did not last long.

[at Luang Prabang. 286
--Analyst]